

clerk/typist job with the federal government. As I now sit here at work typing this out on government time and on this government machine I'll never forget the most memorable customer I ever had as a carpet installer. The job was in a really nice apartment where lived an ancient widow whose hands & head shook slightly all of the time. After my partner, John, and I started to move the furniture from the living room to an outside patio area she begged us to stop. "Do you have to move it all out?" she said. "I'll never be able to remember how all of it goes back." John explained it to her. "Ma'am, we gotta move it all out so we can pull up the old carpet and padding and replace it with the new carpet and padding." She seemed puzzled. Her hands and head shook a little more. "You mean to tell me," she said, "that you don't have a machine that'll raise the furniture up into the air while you work underneath it?" John and I looked at each other in disbelief and rolled our eyes. Before going on with the job we decided to diagram her apartment on a sheet of paper and indicate with abbreviations (CT for coffee table, C for couch, etc. ...) where every piece of furniture sat so we could put her world back together the way it was before we took it apart.

#### PUSSY-WHIPPED

The cat came over to me and rubbed the side of his head against my leg. He purred. I paid Maxx no mind at all. I kept my eye on the hockey game.

But the small monster had another plan of attack. He started talking trash.

"Meow, meow. Meoow. Meeow. Meeooww. Mee-eooow. Meeoow."

I looked down at him & said, "Shut the fuck up you little bastard."

He hissed and swiped at me with his paw.



"HEY, YOU!" I got up and chased him into the kitchen.

He ran to his bowl. He stood next to it. It was empty. He looked up at me. "Meow. Meow." A hopeful look came over his tiny face.

I threw my hands up in the air.

"Okay, okay," I said. "You win."

— Robert W. Howington

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#### AT THE DEBBIE REYNOLDS HOLLYWOOD HOTEL

In high school some of the girls I knew carried photos of Debbie Reynolds in their wallets and wanted to be gym teachers when they grew up because that's what Debbie'd said in Photoplay she'd wanted to be till she won the Miss Burbank beauty contest and got rich and famous instead but when those girls in high school I knew grew up they all got married and had daughters they named Debbie although Debbie Reynolds' real name was Mary Frances and those Debbie Daughters had daughters they named Jennifer or Jessica, and today, here in Las Vegas, Nevada, I sit in the Bogie Bar of the Debbie Reynolds Hollywood Hotel where giant photos of dead movie stars hang on the walls, Bogie, Audrey, Joan Crawford, John Garfield and Wayne, Bill Holden, Cary Grant, Coop, Marilyn Monroe, and more, and I watch the girls, maybe some of the same ones I knew in high school, now much-older women, standing in line to buy tickets to see the Debbie Reynolds Show their hair perfectly coiffed, grey or dyed red or brown or black, wearing sequins or leather or sweats, Nikes or Doc Martens or 4-inch stiletto high heels, holding hands with their first, second, or third husband, some of the girls having had a Liz in their lives too who took away their First Love, some having gone through bankruptcy, forever unsinkable just like Debbie Reynolds, those girls smoking or laughing or staring straight ahead, thinking how soon they'll be close to Debbie Reynolds as she sings and dances on stage, a stage like the one they placed her upon in their wallets a hundred decades ago, while all the dead movie stars smile down on them, kindly, beautiful gods, forgiving the girls for not liking them best,